

United States of America. Now we are going to have a chance for marriage penalty elimination. Talk about sensible tax relief for all taxpayers.

So let us not start the rhetoric of this new year and this new millennium with accusations of foot dragging and partisanship. I implore the other side of the aisle to be calm, to be rational, and to be deliberate as we debate the very important issues confronting the American people. But if we are going to start with these types of one minutes of accusation, innuendo and character assassination, then I think the year will start off just as it ended last year, with acrimony and bitterness.

Let us start for the American people a better way on this floor by proving we can legislate and not sit here and constantly belittle the other side of the aisle.

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GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT REAL HMO REFORM

(Mr. GREEN of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I follow my colleague from Florida in saying that I agree that we should work together. In fact, last year this House passed and worked very hard on a bipartisan Norwood-Dingell bill, on managed care reform, but we have not seen any action in months.

We should stop the delay in managed care reform. We do not need gimmicks or watered down proposals that wind up doing nothing for patients.

In my home State of Texas, we passed these protections in 1997 included in the Norwood-Dingell bill, and there have been no massive premium increases or mass filing of lawsuits that are used against the bill. What Texas residents do have is elimination of gag clauses, open access to specialists, timely appeals processes, coverage for emergency care and holding the medical decision maker accountable.

We do not need any more delays. We need to act this year on a bipartisan basis and pass this bill. Hopefully, the conference committee will at last meet after all these months and pass real HMO reform, and today we will have that opportunity with the motion to instruct the conference committee. We need HMO reform now.

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CONTINUING THE RECORD U.S. ECONOMIC EXPANSION

(Mr. DREIER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, it is generally known that success has 1,000 fathers and defeat is an orphan. I would like to stand here and go one step further and compliment the President, for in his State of the Union he used the plural "we" in describing the fact that as we mark this February 1, 2000, it is

the anniversary of the longest economic expansion in our Nation's history. I am glad that he used the plural "we" in describing the fact that we have encouraged policies which have allowed the American people to bring about this economic expansion.

The real challenge is are we going to continue to do everything that we can to pursue those shared goals of maintaining a balanced budget, reducing the tax burden on working Americans, encouraging global trade, which is very, very key, making sure that we continue to reform welfare, and encourage work and productivity. I think we have a chance to do that.

HMO reform, I would say to my friend from Texas, is among those priorities. Congress adjourned before Thanksgiving. It is true that in the last couple of months we have not been working on it, but we are committed to moving ahead with that legislation just as quickly as we possibly can. I am glad that we are working together.

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ENSURING STRONGEST POSSIBLE PATIENT PROTECTIONS IN HMO REFORM

(Mr. WYNN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WYNN. Mr. Speaker, this year Congress can begin to address one of America's most pressing problems, reforming managed care. But HMO reform will be meaningless if we do not have a real Patients' Bill of Rights with teeth.

Last year we got the process started. We passed the bipartisan Dingell-Norwood bill, which has real teeth in it. What do we need to do now? First, we need to get started. There has been too much delay. Let us convene the conference committee. Second, we need to insist on the part of the House that we include the tough standards that give patients the right to sue, that require utilization review, that require independent appeals processes and that enable constituents to have an explanation in writing of why they were denied care.

When people are denied care by HMOs, they are harmed. When HMOs harm citizens, they have to be held accountable. The way to hold them accountable is to insist that our legislation includes the tough standards that the House passed last year. We can do it together. I certainly believe this ought to be one of our first orders of business as we begin the new year. I think if we do that we can make real progress for the American people.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Ms. DELAURO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, 4 months ago we passed a bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights. This is a monumental piece of legislation to reform HMOs. It provides basic rights of care for all Americans. It ensures that we are able to choose our own doctors; that we have access to the nearest emergency room; that we have a specialist when we need one, if we need one for our health; and, yes, indeed, to hold HMOs accountable for the medical decisions that they are making every single day.

Unfortunately, the GOP leadership continues to stall this legislation. I call upon the Republican leadership to stop their delay tactics, pass meaningful HMO reform. This is a bipartisan bill; we have broad support amongst the rank and file Members. We must act to give 160 million Americans access to health care in this country. We owe it to the American people to enact this legislation and to enact these reforms now.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Ms. SCHAKOWSKY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, now is the time for a real Patients' Bill of Rights; and today is the day that we should instruct the conferees to move quickly to pass a strong bill.

I have a letter from constituents.

Dear Representative Schakowsky: We beg you to please do everything you possibly can to support a Patients' Bill of Rights for those of us who find ourselves in the merry-go-round of dealing with HMOs and reluctant insurance company benefit providers. It has gotten to the point of being ridiculous when patients are subjected to mental torture by these big companies.

This certainly cannot be what our Founding Fathers had in mind. Ultimately, we have only one means of relief, the United States Congress. I understand the big providers have lobbyists, with deep pockets, fighting any legislation that would force them to be more fair and of understanding their responsibilities to their customers, but this cannot be allowed to interfere with what we all know to be basically right and wrong. This is what the average American cannot understand. Why cannot Congress just do what is right for the people whose well-being has been entrusted to them?

It has been entrusted to us. This is the day that we can act to say move quickly, move now.

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PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

(Mr. GEJDENSON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, it is time for the conferees to move forward with a patients' bill of rights. The leadership of this Chamber, which has